

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

Army review(s)  
completed.

17 September 1981

Colonel James W. Dunn  
Chief, Histories Division  
Department of the Army  
The Chief of Military History and  
the Center of Military History  
Washington, D.C. 20314

Dear Colonel Dunn:

We have reviewed the enclosures to your letter of 2 September 1981 regarding the final deletions on pages 32, 35-36, and 44-45 of the CMI draft manuscript, Army Communications in Southeast Asia. We are pleased to note that the final deletions to which we collectively agreed in our meeting on 1 September 1981 have been made in addition to the revisions you had already accepted from our initial review of 23 July 1981.

On the assumption that we have now seen all material bearing our interests, this letter constitutes our clearance for open publication of this manuscript, as revised.

Sincerely,



Chief, Classification Review Division  
Office of Information Services  
Directorate of Administration

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY AND THE CENTER OF  
MILITARY HISTORY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20314

DAMH-HD

2 September 1981

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[redacted]  
Chief, Classification Review  
Division  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, DC 20505

STATINTL

Dear [redacted]

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The deletions to CMH draft manuscript, Army Communications in Southeast Asia, which you felt must be made as outlined in your letter of 23 July 1981 were discussed with [redacted] of your office. Attached are the revised pages, with deletions, as agreed upon by both parties. Please advise that the manuscript, as revised, is cleared for open publication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Dunn", is written over the typed name and title.

JAMES W. DUNN  
COL, MI  
Chief, Histories Division

Inclosures  
As stated  
(pp. 32; 35-36;  
44-45)

Improper staffing, restrictive bureaucratic procedures, and conflicting priorities within the Country Team had caused confusion and delays during a time when the South Vietnamese vitally needed strong telecommunications and broadcasting to counter an increasingly aggressive political and military offensive by the Communists. While development of a South Vietnamese communications system was stalled by bureaucratic delays within the American aid program, the North Vietnamese were rapidly building a less ambitious but efficient communications network for their own nation. Rehabilitating the old French wire lines and using radios that the Soviet Union and China had given their new communist ally, veteran Viet Minh communicators had constructed a comprehensive wire and radio-telegraph system that linked every province in North Vietnam with Hanoi.\*

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\* Incl to Ltr, Army Attache, Saigon, to DA, ACoS, G-2, 17 Feb 54, sub: Information Received...Vietnam, file 10275, ACSI files, 66A3138/215, WNRC.

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Providing communications for the Viet Cong, those Communists who had secretly remained in South Vietnam after the Geneva Accords, was far more difficult. The only legal means of communications between north and south was post cards that were supposed to contain only personal information. Exchanged on a bridge in the Demilitarized Zone

contact with infiltration groups as they traveled along the southern half of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.\* ✓

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\* Spector, Advice and Support, Ch. 14, pp. 15-27. ✓

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Although the use of radio enabled the Communists to speed up urgent messages, it also made the underground movement more vulnerable to detection and disruption through electronic warfare. Throughout the French Indochina War, the French Army had intercepted Viet Minh communications from several monitoring stations in South Vietnam and Laos. A forty-man detachment remained to run five intercept stations until mid-1957, when the French, after disagreements with President Diem, withdrew all their communications intelligence teams from South Vietnam.\* ✓

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\* Msg, Willimas to Schow, 6 Jan 55, file 96; DF, Ch, Direct Aid Div, to Ch, MAAG, 29 Jan 57, sub: Conversation with General Don on ✓

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Intercept; DF, Ch, Direct Aid Div, to Ch, MAAG, 14 Jan 59. Both in no. 3, file 23; Record of conversation between President Diem and General Williams, 15 Mar 57, in record of conferences with President Diem, 31 Dec 56 - 12 Sep 57. All in General Williams Papers. Ltr, CINC, French Forces in Indochina, to Military Attache, American Legation, Saigon, Mar 52, 66A3138/215, WNRC. ✓

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When President Diem requested that the United States pick up the intercept mission, General Williams forwarded the request to the Communications Intelligence Board in Washington, the group that managed all U.S. electronic warfare activities. Despite Diem's personal plea to Allen Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency and chairman of the intelligence board, American intelligence officials decided that the ceiling on the number of Americans permitted in South Vietnam and unstable internal security precluded any American electronic warfare endeavor at the time. Even when the South Vietnamese Army in 1958 discovered evidence of the communications complex in Intersector 5 and requested direction finding equipment to pinpoint it, General Williams was unable to help. The only radio intercept program directed against the Viet Cong after the French teams left, three critical years during which the communists were building their organization in the south, was conducted from distant stations in neighboring countries.\* ✓

its ties with the local populace. Concerned more with the threat of invasion from North Vietnam, President Diem wanted the Civil Guard transferred to his Ministry of Defense. He felt that because the Michigan State advisory team had armed the Guardsmen with pistols and trained them as American highway patrolmen, they could not augment the armed forces and defend against heavily armed communist regular units in time of war. He especially disdained of the failure of the U.S. Operations Mission to provide the Civil Guard with communications and even appealed -- unsuccessfully -- to other Western countries for signal equipment for that purpose.\*

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\*Record of conversation during protocol visit of General I.D. White to President Diem, 16 Jan 58, in records of conferences with President Diem, 28 Dec 57 to 29 May 58, General Williams Papers.

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The importance of communications in combatting communist terrorism in rural communities had been acknowledged early in the conflict. In the fall of 1957 a report was made to the ambassador:

The lack of communications is not a point which needs much elaboration since it is a running thread through all reports submitted by American personnel close to the situation in the South. We cite merely one recent report by Mr. Hoyt of the Police Division of MSU in which he detailed his observations on an inspection trip of Civil Guard posts in the southwest. Wherever he went, the plea was the same: give us better and speedier communications. Without communications, the Central Government is not able to react speedily to counter the Communist campaign, is not able to reassure its loyal supporters in the villages that they can count on quick support when the need is great, and, in fact, is at a continual disadvantage against the

well-timed covert campaign mounted by the Communists.\*

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\*Memo, 30 Nov 57, sub: Comments on the Increasing Seriousness of the Security Situation in South Vietnam, no. 36, file 23, General Williams Papers.

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Planning to integrate Civil Guard communications with the proposed national network, the civilian advisers working with the Civil Guard had delayed ordering equipment for rural security forces until completion of the design for the telecommunications network. While the pleas for communications were lost amid bureaucratic haggling and technical delays, Communist domination of isolated regions that were without communications spread dramatically.\*

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\*Memo for General Williams, 7 Mar 60, sub: Conversations With President Diem During Visit to School Installations at Nha Trang, in records of conferences with President Diem, 30 Nov 59 to 22 Aug 60, General Williams Papers.

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By the summer of 1960, when Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr arrived to replace General Williams as commander of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, little had been resolved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had dispatched General McGarr with the mandate to draft with the South Vietnamese a plan to guide their armed forces in restoring the nation's internal security. Finding that only "immediate and

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